



NEWS RELEASE

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Spring Valley partners begin munitions dig on Glenbrook Road

WASHINGTON – The Spring Valley Partners – the Baltimore District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the D.C. Department of the Environment – announce the start up of a munitions recovery operation scheduled to begin today and expected to last 14 weeks at the area known as Pit 3 located in the 4800 block of Glenbrook Road.

Spring Valley was the site of U.S. Army chemical weapons development and testing during World War I at the former American University Experimental Station. Pit 3 is the last known burial pit located in the 661-acre Formerly Used Defense Site and is part of the ongoing investigation and cleanup of the site.

An Engineering Control Structure or metal plated building with a vapor containment cover (VCC) has been erected over the location of Pit 3. The structure is designed to contain the effects of an accidental blast and the VCC, or fabric cover, is draped over the control structure to ensure that, in the unlikely event of a chemical release during excavation, any chemical vapors are contained and properly filtered. Although the structure's original design met all required safety requirements, additional measures—including an extra layer of aluminum sheeting around the containment unit, and the installation of a real-time air quality monitor located between the excavation pit and the American University campus— were implemented at the request of AU to provide an extra level of assurance for its students, faculty, staff and nearby residents.

The USACE sent letters and additional information to all residents located within 742 feet of Pit 3 giving them basic instructions about the safety procedures, to include shelter-in-place, and contact numbers to answer any questions they may have about the operation and safety during the munitions recovery operation. Included in this 742-foot area, also called the shelter-in-place zone, are parts of American University and 49 homes.

The 742-foot distance is the safety distance calculation determined by the USACE based on a thorough review of all that is known about the site and is based on an instantaneous release of Arsine gas from a 75 mm chemical munition. The distance was based on health standards set by a committee of toxicology professionals from around the world who research and use the best scientific information when setting the standards. The setting of these levels is a process approved by the U.S. EPA. In addition, the committee's work is reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences.

"The safety of the residents of Spring Valley is our primary concern during this cleanup work. All of the public safety measures being implemented are conservative and cover a wide range of protection for human health and the environment," said Steven Hirsh, EPA Region III.

Jim Sweeney of the District of Columbia Department of the Environment said, "We have been deeply involved in the planning of this project and are quite confident that it will be done safely and with full protection of public health and the environment."

Arsine is a colorless, flammable gas that does not burn the eyes, nose, or throat. At high concentrations it has a garlic-like or fishy smell, but a person can be exposed to a hazardous concentration of arsine and may not be able to smell it.

The contractors working at the site recently completed two weeks of extensive training to fully familiarize themselves with the structure and how to safely conduct work inside of it.

"The safety of the community and our workers is the top priority during removal operations. Every necessary precaution will be taken to ensure the work gets done safely, thoroughly, and with minimum disruption to the community," said Dan Noble, USACE Spring Valley Project Manager.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Spring Valley project delivery team will conduct a tour of the Pit 3 munitions recovery dig site for members of the media on Thursday, November 1 at 10 a.m.

An overview of the Pit 3 investigation and excavating activities will be presented followed by a visit around the outside of the engineering control structure (the metal plated building with a VCC). Media will have the opportunity to view inside the structure and view taped videos of previous work that has been conducted by television monitor. In addition, media representatives will have an opportunity to view the various types of equipment being used. Qualified personnel will be available to answer questions.

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Pit 3 is located in the 4800 block of Glenbrook Road. The tour will start at 4825 Glenbrook Road.

Media representatives who plan to attend the tour should call 410-962-2809, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Public Affairs. Shoes for uneven terrain are suggested. **Press credentials will be required. Please R.S.V.P. by October 31.

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<http://www.nab.usace.army.mil/projects/WashingtonDC/springvalley.htm>